

Fear of Reprisal Seen in Medical Care Stand

Physician Thinks Many Doctors Favor Plan to Cover Elderly Under Social Security

BY HARRY NELSON, Times Medical Editor

Fear of reprisal from organized medical groups is responsible for the failure of many doctors to publicly declare themselves in favor of legislation which would place medical care for the aged under the Social Security system, a local physician said Monday.

The physician said he is not so sure that such reprisals would actually be forthcoming, but the possibility that they would occur is a factor in the hesitancy by many doctors to oppose organized medicine's stand against such legislation, he said.

Pledge Support

The physician was contacted during a telephone survey of doctors who have pledged their support to the Southern California Committee for Health Care for the Aged Through Social Security.

Membership includes a number of prominent UCLA and USC medical school faculty members, as well as some private practitioners.

Headquarters for the committee, which endorses the

King-Anderson Health Insurance Benefits Act, proposed legislation which would place medical care of the elderly under Social Security, is 10578 Pico Blvd.

Hearing Testimony

The House Ways and Means Committee is currently hearing testimony in Washington for and against the bill. The American Medical Assn., California Medical Assn. and Los Angeles County Medical Assn. are opposed to the King bill.

"Many doctors feel as I do but don't want to get into a battle with organized medicine because we depend upon membership to them for our livelihood," the Los Angeles physician said.

"It's hard to imagine that a doctor would be ostracized because of public statements in favor of the King bill, but it is a possibility."

Local physicians who have joined the pro-King bill committee are Drs. Forrest Adams, Nicholas Assali, Victor Hall and Henry Olson of the UCLA Medical School faculty; Dr. Peter Lee, pro-

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fessor of medicine and pharmacology at the USC School of Medicine, and the following private practitioners:

Drs. Arthur Brody, Arthur Carstens, Charles Klee-man, Daniel Mishell, Isidore Ruskin and Frederick Wahl.

All of the physicians questioned said they favored the King bill because they see it as a means to meet the medical needs of persons over 65 adequately and with respect for individual dignity.

"That there is a need is apparent to anyone who doesn't close his eyes to the facts of life. One purpose of the committee is to let the public know that all doctors are not in agreement with the AMA position," one of the signees, Dr. Lee, said.

Dr. Ruskin, a psychiatrist who is also a consultant at the Los Angeles Jewish Home for the Aged, said that no other problem is as important to elderly people as their health.

Fear of breakdown of health and fear of becoming objects of charity are their greatest concern, he said.

Worth Measured

"The true worth of any society is measured by its attitude toward those members who are poor, helpless, infirm and aged, and by these standards, considering the affluency of our society, our treatment of the aged is not a shining example and does not reflect well on our society," Dr. Ruskin said.

Dr. Lee said he does not believe that most doctors who adhere to the AMA stand against the King bill are motivated by economic factors.

The typical doctor in private practice is a real rugged individualist who has a sincere belief that socialism—which is the way that he views the King bill—will interfere with his ability to do a good job, he said.

Dr. Lee is the brother of Dr. Phillip Lee, director of the Palo Alto Clinic and a chief organizer in the movement in California by physicians to take a stand on the King bill contrary to that of the AMA.